

March,

1939

LOAN EXHIBITION: A Regional Exhibition "Paintings by Artists West of the Mississippi" will occupy the three loan galleries for a month beginning Sunday, March 5th. This group, originating from the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, has been circulated over the country and has attracted widespread interest. It was shown in the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City and is the first important regional exhibition from the West to be so featured.

The purpose and aims of the exhibition are stated by Stanley Lothrop who assembled the group; "This exhibition is entirely by invitation and, wherever possible, individual canvases have been selected by the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Although an essentially regional art can hardly be said to exist in America on account of easy transportation and frequent change of residence, trends have developed in various Western centers which have a distinct character. The ultimate aim of the present exhibition is to bring together a group of paintings representing the best that is now being done west of the Mississippi, and it is our belief that such a show is more expressive of American art and freer from contemporary European influences than most exhibitions collected in the East."

The reception accorded the exhibition at the hands of New York critics was divergent and interesting. Some found it very significant, others found little to commend. All critics were agreed that the paintings did not seem to represent a distinctive school or movement. Perhaps the most discerning view was that of Martha Davidson in the Art News. "But one feature emerges as distinctive, a feature that is closely allied to the character of the terrain in large sections of the West. That is the close relationship between the artist and the empty vistas that are constantly presented to his sight. Nature, to the painter of California or New Mexico, Colorado or Kansas, is a huge expanse of lowland bordered by highland, of fertile valleys lined with uninhabited mountains."

Considering the vast territory covered by the exhibition, it is fairly inclusive although such names as Grant Wood and Peter Hurd are missing. In all, twelve states are represented and fifty-one artists. In the Missouri section, the work of Lawrence Adams, Thomas Hart Benton, Joe Jones, John De Martelly, Joseph Meert, Frederick Shane and James Turnbull will be seen. Kansas has fewer representations, only Albert Bloch, John Steuart Curry, Karl Mattern and Henry Varnum Poor being included. All are represented by new works not yet seen in Kansas City. The exhibition is an annual one and has been seen several times at the Gallery. Because of its local flavor, it is one of the most interesting of the season and this year, one in which all critics found a most conservative trend, the general level seems to be higher and with a larger proportion of mature artists exhibiting. The group will remain on exhibition until the end of March.

MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH: The Masterpiece for the month of March is the initial acquisition for the present year. A Madonna and Child with St. John by the Florentine artist Lorenzo di Credi, it is the first example of the High Renaissance to be secured for the permanent collection and must be considered as the most important purchase in the field of paintings since the opening of the Gallery five years ago.

The last quarter of the fifteenth century found Florence the supreme city of all Italy in the arts and the humanities. Such men as Filippino Lippi, Botticelli, Ghirlandai, and Verrocchio were painting the superb altarpieces and frescos that adorned the great churches and the private chapels of the City of the Lilies. Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Michelangelo were being trained in the thriving workshops of the city to carry on the tradition of painting into the Full Renaissance. The monumental work of Giotto and Massaccio, the scientific researches of Uccello, Pollaiuolo and Veneziano had been assimilated and painting had become of age.

It was into this Florence, so propitious for a youth of artistic talent, that Lorenzo Barducci was born in 1459. He took the name of di Credi from a great-great-grandfather who had been a famous goldsmith. It is not known when he first entered the studio of Verrocchio,

the sculptor of the great Colleoni in Venice, but it must have been when he was about ten as documents reveal that in 1480 he was working as a master painter with his teacher at a salary of twelve florins a year. Vasari tells us that as a youth, Lorenzo had access to the gardens and classical collection of Lorenzo the Magnificent and this would account for the sculptural quality of his best work.

In the workshop of Verrocchio, Lorenzo worked side by side with another pupil, Leonardo da Vinci, yet it was in di Credi that the master had the greatest faith. In Verrocchio's will, he named Lorenzo his executor and heir to all his possessions and also requested that he carry out all uncompleted work, including the Colleoni. There are other examples of the high esteem in which di Credi was held during his life time. He was appointed one of a commission to pass on the designs for a facade for the great Cathedral in 1491 and seven years later his artistic advice was sought in connection with the cupola. He was called in to help in the decision of the placing of the David by Michelangelo and in 1524 did restoration work on the two equestrian frescos by Uccello and Castagno which still may be seen on the walls of the Cathedral.

Few paintings of the fifteenth century are as well documented as this new acquisition. Not only are the facial types of the Madonna and the Child so characteristic as to be unmistakable, but there exists in the Uffizi Gallery of Florence, a drawing by Credi which fold for fold of the drapery and line for line of the drawing served as a study for the Virgin. Furthermore, the sculptural quality of the figures shows that it is a work done soon after Credi had left the workshop of his master and the exquisite and lyric tonal harmonies prove that he had learned much from the colour theories of Leonardo da Vinci as they worked side by side as apprentices. Dr. Alfred M. Frankfurter has written a monograph on this painting and finds that it is certainly among the best if not actually the most important of Credi's panels to come to America and that it is surely one of the first independent, mature works of the master after his collaboration in the Verrocchio shop. It would seem to be dated between the years 1485-90, the finest period of Credi.

From the point of view of colour, this panel must be considered Credi's masterpiece and one of the most beautiful and harmonious of the entire fifteenth century. It is a symphony of blues and cool greens, against which the luminous flesh tones are all the more warm and vibrant. The mantle of the Virgin is pure and precious ultramarine blue with a rich, golden yellow lining. Her robe is a grayer blue with touches of gold embroidery and the filmy scarf of the Child is a paler blue. St. John wears a gauze robe of blue shadows with a violet scarf. The lush green of the foreground is sown with delicately drawn and exquisitely tinted field flowers and crimson fruit shines in the branches of the sheltering tree. The distant background is a delicate azure with pearly hazes and great depth and spaciousness is suggested behind the group. The whole Renaissance can boast few passages of such exquisite tonal harmonies as found here.

The Gallery has waited almost eight years to represent the great fifteenth century of Florentine painting with an adequate example. It is doubtful if a more appealing or universally popular panel could have been found. It was formerly in the collection of the Earl of Dudley in England, was exhibited in Burlington House in 1871 and in 1892 and is fully described in Volume XIII (page 315) of Van Marle's monumental work on Italian Painting. This acquisition brings to Kansas City not only a superlatively beautiful and technically competent painting, but also a representation from the greatest period of Italian religious art.

WEDNESDAY EVENING LECTURES: On the five Wednesday evenings during March, Mr. Gardner will continue the survey of Italian Painting.

The subject for March 1 will be Painters of the North of Italy and the very individual work of such men as Correggio, Mantegna and the Lombardy followers of Leonardo da Vinci will be considered.

On March 8, the first of two lectures devoted to Venetian Painting will be given. The Queen City of the Adriatic was late in developing an individual school of painting and it was not until well into the fifteenth century that local artists began to emerge. There were two schools, the medieval workshop of the Vivarini and the more progressive one of the Bellinis, based on a knowledge of what was being done elsewhere in Italy plus an influence of Mantegna. The latter triumphed and it was from the ateliers of Giovanni Bellini

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that the greatness of the 16th century and the work of Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese developed. This brilliant century will be the subject for the second lecture on March 15th.

The revolt against the artificiality of the mannerists took place in Bologna in the workshop of the Carracci family who achieved a return to academic standards. This important Bolognese School will be discussed on March 22nd. The academic revival in turn gave way to the naturalistic school of Naples which was headed by Caravaggio. Using dramatic lighting and much action, this school abandoned all idealism and treated its subject matter with a strong and sometime revolting realism. This interesting movement which had such a widespread influence will be discussed on March 29th.

These lectures are all given at 8:00 o'clock in Atkins Auditorium and there is no admission to the Gallery or to the talk.

GALLERY CHANGES: A representative group of Flemish and Dutch prints from the permanent collection will be hung in Gallery 16 for the month of March. This will include works by Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyke, Breughel, Lucas Van Leyden, Hendrick Goltzius and Dirick Vellert. Among the Rembrandts, The Hundred Guilder Print, The Landscape with Three Cottages, Rembrandt Drawing, Dr. Ephraim Bonus and Beggars at the Door will be shown.

Gallery 13 has been installed with a group of Italian drawings from the permanent collection. Included are several early fifteenth century ones by anonymous artists, the fine silver point Baptism by Perugino, perhaps a study for the fresco of the same name in the Sistine Chapel, a Bandinelli Nude from the famous Oppenheimer Collection, a Deposition by Veronese, a Descent from the Cross by Palma Giovane, a Head of a Boy by Piazzetta and typical studies by Canaletto, Pietro Longhi and Tiepolo.

The special Oriental exhibition of the month in Gallery 24 is a group of Chinese robes and textiles. The clothing people wore and the materials they used give a more intimate view of an epoch than any other kind of craft. They are, in a sense, more temporary, more of the moment than the paintings, porcelains or even the furniture. These textiles of the eighteenth century show court life from the last really great and affluent days of the Chinese empire - the reign of the famous emperor Ch'ien Lung. Two embroidered satin coats belonged to the wives of an imperial prince who died in 1738 and reflect the rather restrained taste of the preceding century. A group of three official palace coats show the brilliant, ornate style of the full eighteenth century. Two of these robes were sacrificial coats of an emperor as may be judged from the yellow colour and symbolic ornament.

The exhibition is arranged primarily to illustrate different kinds of technique. The finest work in brocade, tapestry and embroidery may be studied in the series of official insignia squares selected from the permanent collection and the collection of Mrs. Krenz.

FRIENDS OF ART: The first meeting of the Study Class on March 8 at 11 A.M. in the Library will be devoted to a discussion on the loan exhibition of the month, the Artists West of the Mississippi. Paintings from the exhibition will be used as illustrations.

On March 22nd, a survey of French 18th century furniture will be given, illustrated by chairs from the permanent collection. This was a period rich in fine cabinet making and fortunately the Gallery owns outstanding examples that cover the entire century.

GALLERY NOTES: Among the out of town visitors to the Gallery this month was Miss Chie Hirano of the Asiatic Library at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Miss Hirano is en route to the Orient and stopped in Kansas City particularly to see the Gallery's Oriental collections.

Mr. Gardner will address the Kansas Home Economics Association on March 24th when they meet in session at the Wyandotte High School.

CALENDAR FOR MARCH

Wed., March 1, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture - Painters of the North
of Italy - Mr. Gardner
Sun., " 5, 3:30 - Auditorium - Concert - Federal Concert
Orchestra
Wed., " 8, 11:00 - Library - Friends of Art Study Class
Wed., " 8, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture - Venetian Painting I -
Mr. Gardner
Sun., " 12, 3:30 - Auditorium - Concert - Kansas City Conserva-
tory of Music
Wed., " 15, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture - Venetian Painting II,
Mr. Gardner
Sun., " 19, 3:30 - Auditorium - Concert - Tau Chapter of Sigma
Alpha Iota
Wed., " 22, 11:00 - Library - Friends of Art Study Class
Wed., " 22, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture - School of Bologna -
Mr. Gardner
Sun., " 26, 4:00 - Auditorium - Concert - Auspices Mrs. Hunt
and Miss Forsythe
Wed., " 29, 8:00 - Auditorium - Lecture - School of Naples -
Mr. Gardner

William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art
Atkins Museum of Fine Arts
Kansas City, Missouri

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